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Letter dated 14 January 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the concept paper for the Security Council briefing to be held on the theme "War, its lessons and the search for a permanent peace" on 29 January 2014 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Zeid Ra'ad Zeid **Al-Hussein**
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Concept note

War, its lessons and the search for a permanent peace

At the close of the Second World War, and almost 70 years ago, the United Nations was established principally to prevent yet another "world" war from occurring.[1] In practice, however it has also led humanity's march "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war";[2] "war" in this context refers to war in general, including civil wars, which may often appear to be entirely internal in their construction, but which invariably have causes, or consequences, that are transboundary and can therefore impact on international peace and security.

Over the past 69 years, the Security Council has mandated tasks for United Nations personnel ranging from observing truces and separating warring parties to deepening institutional involvement; for example, assisting post-conflict States in the drafting of their new constitutions, or training personnel, from police to air traffic controllers. This is well known. Yet, most of what the United Nations has achieved in maintaining international peace and security has been mainly physical: the separation of warring parties; mediation between them; the training of police personnel; and the provision of assistance in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure, among other achievements.

What the United Nations has not understood well enough is how it can help forge a deeper reconciliation among ex-combatants and their peoples based on an agreed or shared narrative, a shared memory, of a troubled past. This is especially relevant to sectarian, or ethnic, conflicts, as well as wars driven by extreme nationalism or ideologies. Even though the United Nations has, on occasion, assisted in setting up important truth commissions, its overall emphasis still tends towards quick-impact projects, pilot projects, and early and rapid economic development, in the belief that reconciliation will somehow take care of itself. It may well happen, or it may not. Even if it does happen, without a deeper analytical calculus underpinning it, reconciliation can easily remain superficial, vulnerable to any misguided individual with charisma and leadership skills able to exploit and abuse lingering historical grievances for political ends in a way that revives historical hatreds to create new challenges to international peace and security.

The thematic debate proposed by Jordan, as president of the Security Council for January 2014, is intended to enable the Council to draw lessons from the understanding of war and about what is necessary to achieve a permanent peace. The Jordanian presidency believes there is value in "reverse engineering" war analytically to arrive at conclusions concerning its leading causes: the divergent historical narratives pitting one people against another, sometimes feeding chauvinistic ideologies already laced with beliefs of victimization and injustice, and held, especially, by those who then inflict pain and violence on others. Did not the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s manipulate historical narratives in

[1] " ... which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind ...", Charter of the United Nations, first preambular paragraph.

[2] Charter of the United Nations, first preambular paragraph.

the service of its hate-filled ideology? Have not many other individuals and groups, elsewhere throughout the world, likewise preyed upon an "unresolved" historical narrative for political ends, thereby sharpening the risk of an eventual armed confrontation? The psychological considerations that often fuel many of our conflicts are therefore recognizable to us, but their treatment has thus far seemed elusive or deemed too dangerous to address — the wounds will just be reopened, we have believed.

In recent years, an appreciation of the importance of individual criminal accountability for the most serious crimes has increasingly captured international attention. Aside from the supreme need for justice, there is broad recognition that "forced amnesia", the traditional modus operandi of approaching reconciliation, also carries dangerous risks. As is now recognized and appreciated, the truth must claim its rightful place, not just in courts of law but also in the settlement of armed conflicts. And yet the truth can only claim its place if it is properly determined, understood and agreed upon by the former warring sides.

A central question that delegations are invited to consider in the debate is: what are the risks of the alternative? That is, if we continue to subordinate "memory" to political arrangements, security sector reform and early economic recovery, among other things, and not elevate it to a higher order of importance, do we not risk, for example, maintaining situations where all we have is a deceptive, shallow peace, or the absence of fighting masquerading as peace, rather than sustainable peace with secure foundations?

Delegations are also invited to reflect on where there are positive examples of meaningful reconciliation based on shared historical understanding helping to cement lasting peace. What lessons can be learned from these examples and how might these lessons be drawn upon to create models of best practice that can be applied in existing and future post-conflict situations?

What can or must the Security Council do specifically? The Jordanian presidency asks delegations to consider the following. If a prerequisite for any shared narrative is the availability of the documents of State, could the Council consider mandating a small United Nations historical advisory team — when the guns draw silent — to assist those authorities who seek urgently the recovery or protection of those documents? It should not end there. Could the team also assist in the early work required to set up a "functional" national archive (which, in almost all conflict-affected countries, does not exist)? Or assist in the early establishment of a national historical commission, in the event the conflict is largely internal in character, or an international historical commission, if it is international in character?

All of these issues are sensitive. Indeed, precisely because of their sensitivity, there has been a tendency to avoid them, rather than to tackle them responsibly.

In summary, the Security Council must, in the opinion of the Jordanian presidency, think differently and figure out how best to work those very physical arrangements to end the actual fighting to achieve authentic, irreversible peace, reinforced by a shared historical understanding of the prior conflict.

The Jordanian presidency therefore intends to invite the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs to brief the Security Council on the importance of learning from history generally, and how a shared understanding of the past will in turn consolidate international peace and security, the challenge of which is the foremost responsibility of the Security Council.